

August 27, 2013

The Honorable Rick Jones,
Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman
915 Farnum Building
P.O. Box 30036
Lansing, MI 48909-7536

The Honorable Kurt Heise,
House Committee on Criminal Justice Chairman
N-699 House Office Building
P.O.Box 30014
Lansing, MI 48909

Dear Senator Rick Jones and Representative Kurt Heise:

Thank you for taking time to address my concerns regarding Juvenile Life Without Parole in Michigan. The great state of Michigan has been a progressive and moral leader for centuries becoming the first English-speaking territory in the world to abolish the death penalty in 1847. Sadly, I have had personal experience with the tragedy of murder and have learned more than I ever wanted to know about our judicial system with its strengths and its most serious flaws. I feel compelled to speak out against JLWP for a number of reasons. The most important reason, the one that weighs heaviest in my heart is perhaps the least obvious; it is the utter and complete lack of hope at the core of sentencing children to spend their entire lives in prison and the devastating, enduring impact it has on the families of both the victim and the offender and our entire society.

My life changed forever the night I received the call that my beautiful daughter and her roommate had been brutally murdered on November 1, 2004. A shroud of darkness fell over me and I could not breathe. It was inconceivable that the vibrant, shining essence which for twenty-six years had been Leslie Ann Mazzara, the light of my life, my flesh and blood, my youngest child, could be gone forever. Her beautiful and promising life was stolen that night in an act of terror; in a gruesome act of selfish anger and rage. I was thrust on a journey through hell seemingly without end, and began a mother's mission to make meaning out of the meaningless.

My Unitarian Universalist faith teaches that all will ultimately be reconciled with God, even murderers. Remarkably, Jesus was capable of forgiving his own murderers as he suffered on the cross. As a UU minister, I seek to follow the teachings and the example of Jesus, but forgiving the murderer of my daughter for the loss of my never-to-be-born grandchildren; babies that my arms ache to hold, still seems inconceivable to me. However, I know that if I don't walk towards that hope, I will be doomed to dwell in despair and pain forever. It is about choosing life, again and again, day after day. It's about making our tears holy and keeping our broken hearts open. Life without parole for juvenile offenders holds us hostage, stagnating our hope, compounding the tragedy, and escalating the conflict resulting only in more victims.

We will begin to heal ourselves and our world when we refuse to participate in perpetuating the cycle of violence. Please help our great state make a powerful statement of hope to the rest of the country and to the entire world. We must choose a better path; a path of restorative justice.

We will only make our world safe by creating loving and safe homes for every child. This is what true justice looks like. Let us invest in making certain that all children have the opportunity to grow up to be healthy, whole adults. We will change the world one child at a time, and then we can dare to dream that one day no mother's child will grow up to be a murderer.

Sincerely,

Reverend Cathy Harrington
818 N Rath Avenue
Ludington, MI 49431